



NEL – Surname of the week

Meaning: "Champion"

There is a widespread presence of the NEL surname throughout the world and each bare a different origin, spelling and coat of arms. For South-Africans there was only 2 NEL progenitors of the surname. A Guillaume and an Etienne that was both from French descent. Looking at the eagle in the coat of arms one can clearly see some German ancestry further back down the line.

- Guillaume Néel - bap 25 December 1663 Quevilly, Rouen, Normandie, France
- Estienne Niel - * c1668 Dauphine, France

Recorded in many spelling forms including Nel, Nell, Néel, Nelle, Nelles, Nellis, Neill, Niel, and Nyles, all derive from the pre 7th century Norse-Viking personal name "Njall". Translating as "Champion". The name in its many forms has become one of the most popular of all surnames. This is not surprising, given the meaning, and the fact that between the 6th and the 10th century's A.D., the Vikings held sway over most of Western Europe. In those years, it would have been both politically correct, and probably expedient, to call ones eldest son in particular, Neil, Neal, or Niall. As both the personal name and the surname are now recorded, often in the same spellings, throughout Europe, it is difficult, except with absolutely localized spellings, to say where a particular surname spelling originates. In this case the surname is recorded very early in both Britain and Germany, with early examples including Robert Neel of Stafford in the year 1294, and Bertold der Nelles zu Bretten, in Germany in 1357. Other examples include Allis Nelle, who married Rychard Adalle, at St Margaret's, Westminster, on November 14th 1561, and Clem Nel who married Elizabeth Tanner, at St Gregory's by St Pauls (Cathedral), city of London, on July 1st 1619. A refugee example is that of Francois Neelz, a Huguenot, who was recorded at Threadneedle Street French Church, London, in 1705. The first recorded spelling of the family name is believed to be that of Henry Nel, and dated 1260, in the Assize Court rolls of the city of Cambridge, during the reign of King Henry III of England, who reigned from 1216 to 1272.

Notable people with the name include:

- André Nel (born 1977), South African cricketer
- Andries Nel (born 1965), South African deputy minister
- Anton Nel (born 1961), American classical pianist
- Corne Nel, South African rugby player
- Dewald Nel (born 1980), South African-born Scottish cricketer
- Elizabeth Nel (1917–2007), English personal secretary to Winston Churchill during the Second World War
- Gerrie Nel (born 1961), South African advocate and prosecutor
- Gert Cornelius Nel (1885–1950), South African botanist
- Gert Vlok Nel (born 1963), South African poet
- Grant Nel, Australian diver
- Jack Nel (born 1928), South African cricketer
- Jacques Nel (born 1993), South African rugby player
- Japie Nel (born 1982), South African rugby player
- Jean-Pierre Nel, South African rugby player
- JP Nel (born 1981), South African rugby player
- Justin Nel (born 1987), Namibian rugby player
- Krubert Nel (born c.1960), South African Army officer
- Michiel Daniel Christiaan De Wet Nel (born 1901), South African Politician
- Philip Nel (born 1969), American scholar of children's literature and professor of English
- Philip J. Nel (1902–1984), South African rugby union player

- Riana Nel (born 1982), Namibian singer and songwriter
- Ricus Nel (born 1979), Afrikaans musician, singer and songwriter
- Ruhan Nel (born 1991), South African rugby union player
- Susan Nel (born 1956), South African lawn bowler
- Vita Nel, South African beach volleyball player
- Wenda Nel (born 1988), South African hurdler
- WP Nel (born 1986), South African-born Scottish rugby player

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